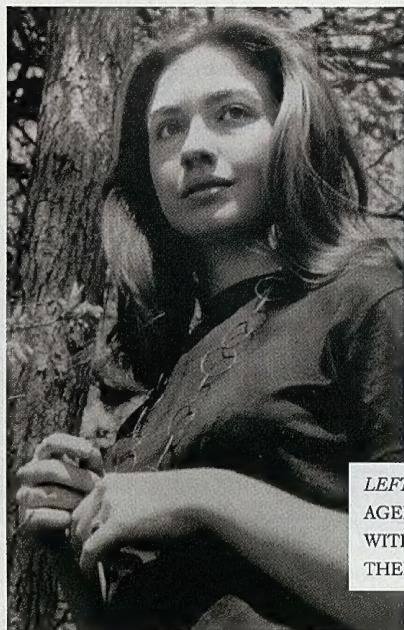


The campaign for the November 2008 presidential election began unusually early, and, for the first time ever, a woman, Hillary Rodham Clinton, leads in every national poll for nomination by a major party. We are a very long way from the first votes in the state primaries, and there is plenty of room for gaffes and implosion, but at this point, Hillary and her team have demonstrated an organisational skill and talent for fundraising (crucial in US politics) that, whether she wins or loses, will provide a master template for all future female candidates.

Hillary's recovery from the scandals of her husband's two presidencies is a remarkable saga of persistence and survival. By brazen stubbornness, as well as craft and stealth, she has reshaped her public image and persuaded millions of American voters that she would indeed make a credible president. But there are millions of others who still distrust and vilify her, sometimes in luridly satanic terms.

Hillary's story is about generations as well as female achievement. Born, as I was, in 1947, she belongs to the post-war 'baby boom', whose bumptious rebellion would fuel the 1960s counter-culture. Many girls entering college in that decade rejected Fifties domesticity and aspired to career success and financial independence.



LEFT: HILLARY RODHAM AGED ABOUT 17. RIGHT: WITH BILL CLINTON ON THEIR WEDDING DAY IN 1975

But Hillary, as her many critics have pointed out, did not rise to her present prominence through her talents alone. Rather, she rode the coat tails of a charismatic man, Bill Clinton, whom she followed to his native state of Arkansas, where he was twice elected governor, and then to the White House. Hence Hillary's acclaim has been overshadowed by the charge that she is a 'Lady Macbeth', operating from behind the scenes. More damagingly, for someone promoted as a champion of feminism, she stood by her Lothario husband after he had exploited the women he had affairs with – notably Paula Jones and Monica Lewinsky.

Hillary was born in Chicago to middle-class parents with raw working-class roots. However bright Hillary's encomiums of her childhood in the affluent suburb of Park Ridge, Illinois, her parents seem to have been guarded personalities who promoted her ambitions, but who were less indulgent of her younger brothers, Hugh Jnr and Tony, whose adult lives have been

unfocused, feckless, and at times pitiable. The first-born Hillary's early competitiveness with her two brothers seems signalled in childhood photos, where she projects a strangely fixed, artificial smile amid the horde. Young Hillary was a Girl Scout, class president and a budding conservative whose political opinions reflected those of her Republican family. As a high-school student, she campaigned for the arch-conservative Barry Goldwater in the 1964 presidential election. However, the seeds of her later liberalism were sown through the social activism of the Methodist Church, where she was drawn to a progressive minister, the Reverend Don Jones, who took his young parishioners to hear Martin Luther King Jr speak. Jones remained a lifelong adviser, and counselled Hillary during her marital crisis following the Lewinsky scandal.

At the posh Wellesley College outside Boston, Hillary continued her leftward drift. Majoring in political science, she made national news at her graduation ceremony in 1969 when she abandoned her prepared speech to berate the guest of honour, Edward Brooke – Massachusetts' debonair black senator – for questioning the tactics of student protest then roiling the US. She was applauded by the students, but some parents found her behaviour rude and selfish.

Hillary and Bill met at Yale Law School and began dating. (I was then attending the graduate school across the street, but never met them.) After graduation, Bill returned to Arkansas; Hillary moved to Washington DC to work on the staff advising the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives, which was mulling over the impeachment of Richard Nixon. Nixon resigned in 1974 to avoid becoming the first president impeached in over a century – a disgrace that would, ironically, be suffered by Hillary's own husband three decades later.

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HILLARY WITH DAUGHTER CHELSEA IN ABOUT 1983

own promising career, or follow her heart? Her heart won out: she moved to Arkansas in 1974, and married Bill the following year. In 1976, two years before Bill was elected governor, she joined the prestigious Rose Law Firm in the capital of Little Rock. There she became close to two figures who would later be hired by the Clinton White House and plunged into scandal – Webster Hubbell, who was indicted for fraud and jailed; and Vincent Foster, who mysteriously committed suicide in a Washington park.

Controversy still swirls about Hillary's Arkansas days. She kept her maiden name – a provocative act in the traditional South at that time. She signalled her indifference to local sensibilities by reading books at her husband's side during university football games. There were rumours of screeching marital spats in the governor's mansion concerning his amorous escapades. She received a lucrative windfall from shares in cattle futures that would later come under legal scrutiny.

Bill lost his first re-election campaign, but regained the governorship in 1982 – significantly, after Hillary took the name Clinton. Her appearance was also in flux: the bookish careerist with the thick glasses, who had seemed cold and dowdy compared with Bill's flamboyant mother Virginia, became a waspish peroxide blonde whose coiffures went through a dizzying metamorphosis – as if she were in search of a feminine self.

Bill's sudden rise to the presidency in 1992 took everyone by surprise. A vacuum had been created by the withdrawal of major candidates who thought the re-election of George HW Bush was inevitable. But when an independent candidate, the cantankerous Texas billionaire Ross Perot, ate into Bush's support, the relatively unknown and untested Bill Clinton won a narrow victory. Without adequate time to vet him thoroughly, the national media had carelessly dismissed such 'bimbo eruptions' as the allegations by a voluptuous blonde nightclub singer, Gennifer Flowers, that she had had a 12-year romance with Bill in Little Rock.

Bill had campaigned on the ambiguous promise of 'two for one' – implying that Hillary would, in effect, be co-president. Shortly after his inauguration, he appointed his wife to head the Task Force on National Health Care Reform, a project she mishandled abysmally and in a secretive and arbitrary manner, earning her enduring opprobrium. She appointed a 500-person task force whose final proposal was a bureaucratic nightmare, and the entire initiative was abandoned the following year. Hillary now claims she has learnt her lesson from the fiasco – it was too much, too fast. But even some Democrats, myself included, wonder if she has in fact renounced her authoritarian elitism and big-government mindset.

She made extensive solo trips abroad, establishing a reputation as an advocate of women's rights, but – perhaps imprudently – left her husband to his own devices. She was also the subject of investigations into an Arkansas land deal and the possible misuse of FBI files. In 1996, she became the first First Lady subpoenaed to testify before a grand jury.

The nadir of the Clintons' troubles was the revelation in 1998 of Bill's affair with Monica Lewinsky. He was impeached by the House of Representatives for lying under oath, then acquitted by the Senate. Paradoxically, Hillary, who at first self-righteously blamed the crisis on 'a vast right-wing conspiracy', gained popularity when she donned the victim mask of a deceived wife. Middle-class women empathised with her marital humiliation and admired her decision to stay with Bill for her daughter's sake. It was melodramatic soap opera, but Hillary emerged sanctified.

While still in the White House, Hillary was approached by New York politicians urging her to run for the US Senate seat for that state, although she had never lived there. The idea seemed preposterous but, because of the disarray of the opposing party, as well as the naked partisanship of the liberal Manhattan media, Hillary waged a successful campaign in 2000, though she rarely met voters impromptu without her constant Secret Service protection.

Once in office, Hillary conducted herself in a decorous and studious manner. She moulded herself to the Senate and deferred to her seniors. Though her accomplishments seem few to outside observers, her re-election by New Yorkers last year with 67 per cent of the vote left her popularity in little doubt.

As she quietly began to focus on the presidency in her own right, Hillary tried to erase her leftist reputation. She joined Senate prayer breakfasts, spoke openly about God, called for regulation of violent video games,

and voted for the resolution in 2002 that gave George W Bush the authority to invade Iraq. This latter decision has come back to haunt her. A vocal segment of the Democratic party, including me, feels that the senators who

voted for the war resolution should be held accountable for their spineless capitulation to the Bush administration agenda, with all its tragic consequences.

It remains to be seen whether Hillary has the finesse to redefine her political history, and to parry and thrust with her opponents in open debate. But she has already become a pioneer for women who will follow the trail she has blazed – and who will one day surely achieve the ultimate goal that may elude her. □

Hillary gained popularity from the Lewinsky affair when she donned the victim mask of a deceived wife



THE CLINTONS IN THE WHITE HOUSE IN 1998



LEFT: BILL WITH MONICA LEWINSKY. RIGHT: HILLARY IN WASHINGTON EARLIER THIS YEAR



win convincingly. But she has managed to keep her coalition together when no one thought she would. In Pollard's view, the most inspiring woman in politics is Tzipi Livni, Israel's foreign affairs minister and vice prime minister. 'I have met her a couple of times and she is awesome. And that has nothing to do with the fact that she's a woman. She is an incredibly powerful figure: very bright, persuasive, has ploughed her own furrow.' Livni is indeed an extraordinary character – and with more than a hint of stateliness about her. She was the first Israeli cabinet minister to make a distinction between Palestinian attacks made on Israeli military targets and terrorist attacks made on civilians; she favours the two-state solution to the peace process; and is widely considered one of the most popular politicians in Israel.

Livni's situation is unique: she has managed to supersede the usual stereotyping that female politicians face. It seems that women are only allowed to fall into two categories: feminine and marketable (Clinton, Royal) or masculine and tough (Thatcher, Merkel).

According to psychotherapist Susie Orbach, author of *What Do Women Want?*, we are in a transitional period between these extremes. There is interest in women like Royal who seem to display a

more 'female' approach to politics, but voters can't quite overcome their prejudice that a leader needs 'male' strengths. 'Indira Gandhi and Golda Meir had to pass as men to be women in those positions. Now the picture is more mixed. Ségolène Royal does appear to represent a set of values that recognise that gender affects how you think. But it's interesting that she is not allowed to be a politician – she is seen as a celebrity. So I don't think we're quite there yet.'

But we are making progress: *The New York Times* suggested earlier this year that 'women are feeling freer to suggest "Vote for Mom"'. The US electorate still remembers Senator Patty Murray, who famously campaigned in 1992 under the slogan 'Just a mom in tennis shoes' (a wisecrack from one of her male colleagues). Now Clinton is reapplying the formula to the presidency. Not that this new 'mom strategy' always plays itself out in the nicest way. Recently, Senator Barbara Boxer (mother of two, grandmother of one) directed a remark at Condoleezza Rice about the Iraq war and the families who would lose servicemen: 'You're not going to pay a particular price, as I understand it, with immediate family.' Rice fired back: 'I thought you could still make good decisions on behalf of the country if you were single and didn't have children.'

If female politicians can find a truce on this issue, there may be progress. Unless, that is, we reach a stage where gender is completely irrelevant. But that is impossible, according to Orbach. 'Gender is integral to who you are and how you deal with the conflicts around you. Thatcher brought a very brutalising, scolding aspect of femininity. Mothers are the real disciplinarians in any family – they say no all the time – and that was the piece of her gender that she brought. But you wouldn't say that of Shirley Williams, say, or Tessa Jowell or Patricia Hewitt: they bring complexity and something more interesting.'

It is more than 30 years since Margaret Thatcher was asked, in her last television interview before the leadership vote in 1975: 'Do you feel that women politicians operate under a special handicap?' 'Yes,' she replied, 'It's like any other woman who works. She's got two jobs the whole time, and it's like a juggler keeping several balls in the air.' Now, of course, there is a dizzying level of media interest too. 'Shortly after Margaret Beckett became foreign secretary, she met

Condoleezza Rice, and a couple of serious newspapers ran pieces on what Beckett was wearing – along the lines of "but Condi's so chic..." says Jenny Watson. 'That really stuck in my mind. There are things that women have to take on that men just don't get. There is more intrusion.'

With that in mind, perhaps the 'iron lady' tag is not so ridiculous after all. And perhaps the most Machiavellian women would be better off marrying the president and wielding influence that way. The spotlight has already fallen on Michelle Obama, the alpha-wife of US presidential candidate Barack. A Princeton- and Harvard-educated mother of two, she earns double her husband's salary as vice-president for external relations at the University of Chicago Hospital. More significantly, he openly credits her with organising and motivating him. Yet the old-fashioned model of the whispering consort is a dangerous idea, according to Riddell. 'That was the Clinton boast – two for the price of one. It went badly wrong for them – and quite right too. Politicians should be elected. I admire Cherie Blair for being separate in a lot of ways.'

So at least the new roll call of female names is a progress of sorts – even if that progress is slower than we might have hoped. Although, with more women in power, we do face an irritating reality. Inevitably, being human, some of them will fail. 'You get men who aren't much cop, but somehow any women who don't do the job are regarded as evidence that women shouldn't be in politics,' says Riddell. But, as Orbach puts it: 'It is better that they are there than not.' □

What Hillary did next

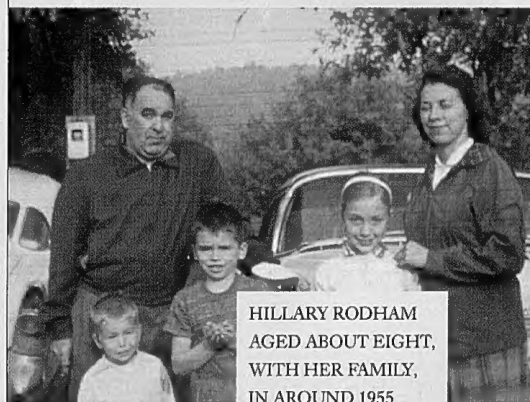
CAMILLE PAGLIA charts the changing fortunes of long-time foe Hillary Clinton, and explains why she would now back her for office

'When the Clintons arrived on the national scene in the early 1990s, I was a huge fan of Hillary,' Professor Camille Paglia tells *Bazaar*. 'I thought she embodied the feisty, outspoken spirit of my generation of post-war American women.'

'However, I became swiftly disillusioned when she mishandled her first assignment: healthcare reform. A vital opportunity for consensus between the two parties was lost, thanks to Hillary's arrogance and obsession with secrecy. I was the first to compare Hillary to Eva Perón – the analogy became standard after that. And I found Hillary's actions during the legal investigations and Monica Lewinsky scandal reprehensible.'

'My views moderated when *The Times* asked me to review Hillary's memoir, *Living History*, in 2003. I was pleasantly surprised at the case made in it for Hillary's lifetime of political commitment. She was slowly emerging from the Bill vortex, but beyond that she has succeeded because of the incredible mediocrity of the political class in the US. In other words, she's become a credible candidate simply because of how deficient everyone else is. If Hillary is nominated for president by my party, the Democrats, then I will vote for her.'

Overleaf, Professor Paglia writes exclusively about her former adversary's reinvention.



HILLARY RODHAM AGED ABOUT EIGHT, WITH HER FAMILY, IN AROUND 1955